

Contributions

LITTLE LESSONS IN CHURCH WORK

G. W. RENCH

IV. The Official Board

Do not become alarmed at this term—"Official Board." It is no more harmful than the term, Sunday school. Either name may become obnoxious by an abuse of the thing they stand for. The different officers of the church have been called to superintend the various departments of church work. These people know the needs of their special field. The Sunday school superintendent knows more about his work—its needs, etc.,—than the president of the S. S. C. E., and the same is true with all departments: People with such information are certainly valuable to the cause, and we should take advantage of such conditions.

But some one is ready to ask "Who constitutes this 'official board'?" I answer, this is not a scriptural term. The Word does not say who shall constitute it, hence circumstances must determine in each congregation. Some congregations have but one deacon and one elder. Here it might be well to include the clerk and treasurer, or the trustees, or the Sunday school superintendent, or all combined. If the congregation has elders and deacons—say two elders and three deacons—these should constitute the "board," and at the meeting when Sunday school work is to be discussed, they will invite the Sunday school officers to meet with them. When the young people's work comes up they will invite the officers of this society to meet with them, etc.

I have been greatly helped by conferences with my officers. When some difficult work was to come before the church we were always united in what should be done, and would advise the church to do it. If we could not agree in time to present the matter at a given time, we would not permit the matter to come up before the church until we were agreed. If something was "sprung" upon the meeting by some one that would likely provoke unpleasant discussions, we would refuse to consider it until, as officers, we had the facts, and then could unitedly ask the church to pursue a certain course. I have been utterly disgusted with the leadership that would come before the church and say, when some perplexing problem was under consideration, "Now, brethren, what do you think we ought to do?" Some good brother ought to say to such cowardice, or ignorance, "You are our elder, why don't you tell us what would be best to be done. If you don't know, how do you expect us to know; besides, it is wrong to discuss such matters, if our leaders can't tell us what to do? How much better it would be if the overseer would say 'Brethren, the officers of the church have carefully and prayerfully considered this matter. We have obtained the facts. In advising you on this we are agreed. For the very best interest of the

church we advise you to do this," etc. No difference who would be at your meeting you need not be ashamed of this better course.

There are many churches that have no pastors. Conferences should be frequently held in such churches. The Sunday school superintendent could call the deacons and others associated with them together for advice. Definite plans for increasing the attendance could be discussed. Reorganization could be discussed. Outings for the classes could be arranged, and the superintendent could urge upon the deacons the need of themselves becoming more active.

In some churches about the only manifestation of life is the S. S. C. E. Let the officers call the president before them and consult as to how they may aid the society in reaching inactive members of the church. Such a meeting consecrated by prayer would be a power within itself.

A SERMON

J. C. CASSEL

Text:—The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven.—Matt. 13: 31-33.

In tropical countries vegetation grows to almost fabulous size. Clarke in his comment on the parable of the mustard seed says that he himself saw in the Norman Isles a field of common cabbage from seven to nine feet high, and that he saw one stalk in the garden of a friend fifteen feet high.

The Savior takes the prodigious growth of vegetation to illustrate the growth of the kingdom of heaven in the world.

The kingdom of heaven in this connection means the visible church, or Christendom. The parable of the mustard is commonly interpreted to teach that the marvelous growth of the mustard seed represents an equal growth of the church and that the birds that come to rest upon its branches represent the converted nations of the earth. I believe that that conception of the parable is at least partly out of harmony with what the Master meant to teach.

In the first place the mustard plant is not a tree in the true sense of the term. The Lord himself calls it an herb, consequently it cannot in any true sense of the term represent the true church of Christ, but its prodigious growth from a small seed, and its soft pithy stem very fitly represents the so-called church of Christ, or what is known as Christendom.

The gospel of Christ is of course the seed. One can read any one of the four gospels in a few hours, and I suppose one could easily read all four in a day; compared with other systems it is small and simple, and it was sown by one despised Nazarene, but it grew prodigiously during the early centuries of our era. It is estimated that there were 500,000 Christians at the end of the first century, 2,000,000 at the end of the second, and 5,000,000 at the end of the third, and before the end of the fourth the Empire of Rome itself had turned from mythology to the

truth for its basis of religion. The growth of the kingdom of heaven (Christendom) indeed was like the growth of the mustard seed, and the character of that growth is also fitly represented by the character of the mustard plant, pithy and soft compared with hardwood tree. The Apostle John says, "I wrote unto the church; but Diotrephes, who loveth the pre-eminence among them receiveth us not. Wherefore if I come I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; 'and not content therewith, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.'" III John 9, 10. This was a bad fellow, one of the birds that lodged on the mustard tree. Paul to the Romans writes thus: Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of which ye have learned; and avoid them; for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. Rom. 16: 17, 18. He repeats the same words to the Phillippians almost verbatim in Phil. 3: 18, 19.

Christ as he looked down upon the seven churches of Asia at the close of the first century found corrupt and ungodly characters in at least four of them.

All these things go to shew that while the church grew rapidly and spread her branches wide and far it was not all solid, substantial growth, but much of it like the mustard tree.

If Christ had meant to demonstrate that the kingdom of heaven, or so-called Christendom would grow up solid and substantial, he would have used the acorn from which the mighty oak grows, which survives every storm, and instead of having the birds (used as omens of evil) resting upon its branches, he would have the shepherd with his flock resting in the cooling shades of the king of the forest.

After Constantine (in the fourth century) became a convert to the Christian religion, and the religion of the state became Christian, there was indeed a mustard seed growth of the church, some of it by suasion, but much of it at the point of the bayonet, but finally the "birds" of all the then known nations came to rest upon the branches of the prodigious mustard tree, and the great Roman hierarchy, the dark ages, murder, bloodshed, persecution with unspeakable cruelty was the result, all in the name of the Christian religion, or the church. The teaching of the parable of the mustard seed has been verified in local church work times without number almost; a little seed of truth is sown in a series of special meetings, accompanied with much human effort in the way of advertizing, or special music, or a Sam Jones preacher, and behold there springs up a great mustard tree, and figuratively speaking, "the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" but the unfortunate part of it is the birds do more harm than good, and if there happen to be too many of them the very